

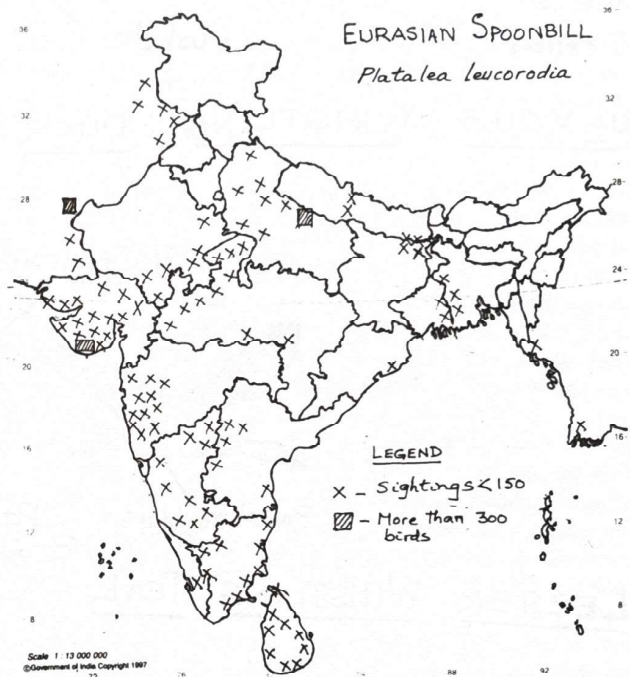
SPOTLIGHT: Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

The Eurasian Spoonbill is a large graceful wading bird found throughout Europe and Asia. Snow-white with long black legs, it has a distinctive, large and flat, spatulate black bill with a yellow tip. There is a reddish-yellow gular skin on the throat. In the breeding season, there is a drooping crest of plumes on the head. It lives by coastal lagoons, estuaries, jheels and marshes. Mostly solitary, sometimes the Spoonbill feeds in small flocks in and around shallow water bodies and muddy tank beds. Actively feeding during morning and evening, its food consists of frogs, molluscs, insects, tadpoles and vegetable matter. During the breeding season, which is between July & November, varying with the Monsoons, it builds a platform nest of sticks amongst heronries on trees in or near water. A normal clutch consists of 4 dirty white eggs with deep brown spots and blotches. The incubation period is about 21 days. Both parents share nest building, incubation and chick rearing duties.

Worldwide, there are 6 species of Spoonbills. These are, the American Roseate, African, Yellow-billed, Royal, Blackfaced and Eurasian Spoonbills. In India only one race, the Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia major* Temminck & Schlegel) occurs. It used to be widely spread through Central and Southern Europe, Africa, Central Asia to Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma) and Japan. In India it is found throughout the country (except in the hilly regions) where it is partly resident and partly a migrant. Old records of the Spoonbill speak of vast flocks arriving in Uttar Pradesh and Jaipur and of "many thousands" on the Chenab and Sutlej rivers near Multan (Pakistan). It was reported as an abundant migrant from extra-limital areas. Subsequently several ring recoveries suggest birds migrating to India from the Caspian region to Maharashtra, Bihar, Rajasthan, M.P., and also to Sind in Pakistan, where it is still found in large numbers. Breeding colonies have been recorded from Bharatpur Sanctuary (Rajasthan). During the Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC) conducted every year in India in January, Gujarat and Rajasthan in the West still record good numbers of Spoonbills and in the South, Point Calimere (T.N.) is the only place where a reasonable population is recorded during the AWC.

In A.P., old observations record more than 200 Spoonbills nesting at "Kolair" (Kolleru Lake, W. Godavari District) and also specimens from Tada in Nellore District. Recent records are from Pakhal (Warangal), Dindi (Nalgonda), Pulicat, Nelapattu and Edurajpatlapalem (Nellore), Shamirpet (Rangareddi) and Nandalur Tank (Cuddapah). A nesting colony has been reported from Edurajpatlapalem. In A.P., only small numbers are seen. The present population trends of Spoonbills in the State, as observed during the BSAP outings and also in the AWC suggest rapidly declining populations mostly due to the loss of habitat and pressure on wetlands.



BIRD-WORD: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled by S. Ashok Kumar

CARRYING CAPACITY Maximum number of individuals of a species that a given area can support or sustain is described as carrying capacity.

CAVITY NESTERS Birds which make cavities for nesting are called cavity nesters.

CEROPHAGY It is wax-eating habit.

CHALAZAE The twisted cords at either end of the white of the egg which suspend the ovum from the shell membrane and keeps it in position. (Singular: Chalaza).

CLASS A main subdivision of a phylum consisting of orders with common characteristics.

CLINE Changes which take place in a species according to the environment in which it lives.

CLOACA The aperture below the tail into which open the rectum and urino-genital ducts.

CLUTCH A group of eggs produced and cubated more or less together by one pair.

COLONY Gregarious living of several individuals of many bird species mainly in the breeding season. Eg: Petrels, Gulls, Rooks

COMMENSALISM Animal or plant living on another animal or plant and sharing its food.

COMMISSURE The junction line of the two mandibles. Also called gape.

COMMUNITY Group of different organisms dependent on each other and occupying a common environment.

CONGENERIC Refers to species of the same genus.

CONSPECIFIC Refers to individuals of the same species.

CONTOURS Quill feathers that form the general covering of the body and which give shape to the body. They are smaller and woolly having poorly developed barbules.

CORIOLIS FORCE The mechanical effects produced by earth's rotation. As a result of this rotation, the weight of a flying bird changes. The Coriolis force is strongest at the poles and is zero at the equator. It is believed that birds sense their 'latitude' by the effects of the force.